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JFK ACT RELEASE

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Bank robber, 'Manchurian Candidate' linked to JFK assassination probe

ED. NOTE: Recent exposure of what many consider to be improper CIA activity, both at home and abroad, has reawakened interest in decade-old challenges to official versions of the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. As new facts also begin to emerge, Congress faces growing pressure to reinvestigate the JFK assassination.

What follows are the strange stories, disclosed here for the first time, of two figures — Richard Case Nagell and Luis Angel Castillo — long of interest to assassination researchers.

WILLIAM W. TURNER

SAN DIEGO, (PNS) — On Sept. 20, 1963, a rangy man with a vertical scar on his forehead strode into the State National Bank in El Paso, Tex., and requested $100 in travelers' checks. Before the teller could comply, he whipped out a pistol and fired two shots into the ceiling. Then he waited to be arrested.

Police quickly realized that the suspect, Richard Case Nagell, 32, was no ordinary bank robber. Papers he carried showed that he was a decorated hero of the Korean War who had gone on to a career in Army Intelligence before being discharged with the rank of captain in 1959.

Why had he pulled the non-robbery?

Last week Dr. Richard H. Popkin, a philosophy professor at Washington University in St. Louis, stepped off a plane in the nation's capital lugging a briefcase containing documents illuminating the strange case of the man who shot a bank. Also crammed into the briefcase was a thick sheaf of papers relating to a bizarre "Manchurian Candidate" episode in the Philippines in 1967.

Both the El Paso and Manila incidents, Popkin said in an interview before leaving for Washington, were linked to the Dallas assassination of John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963. They would "crack the case wide open," he predicted.

The slight, bearded academician was stopping in Washington to present his discoveries to Attorney General Edward Levi and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities before going on to a conference of learned philosophers.

The Second Oswald

Popkin is no stranger to the JFK investigation. In 1966 he published *The Second Oswald*, which chronicled several instances of someone impersonating the man later accused of slaying the president. At the time the book gained scant attention, but recently it was disclosed that as early as June 3, 1960, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover himself wrote an interdepartmental memorandum citing evidence of an Oswald imposter. The FBI knew Oswald at that time as a defector to Russia, and, some conspiracy theorists believe, as a possible CIA agent.

Popkin said he had been in touch with Richard Nagell, now living near San Diego, and had learned about Nagell's friendship with Lee Harvey Oswald. Nagell has fascinated assassination researchers ever since an FBI report filed with the Warren Commission quoted him as saying he had met with Oswald in Mexico City and Texas. But the former intelligence officer had been inacessible. He remained in prison for the El Paso caper until his conviction was reversed for insufficient evidence in 1967, after which he dropped from sight.

Nagell's Version

Nevertheless, researchers were able to glean some picture of Nagell's significance from his defense pleadings and cryptic letters from prison.

In August 1963 Nagell, working as a CIA agent, learned of a domestic plot to assassinate the president, involving Oswald and anti-Castro Cubans. He informed his CIA superior but feared nothing would be done because he lacked details. On Sept. 13 he dispatched a letter warning J. Edgar Hoover of the plot but again assumed no action would be taken.

As Nagell understood it, Kennedy was to be shot in

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Washington about Sept. 26 (as it turned out, JFK left Sept. 25 for a whirlwind tour of the West). Frantic, Nagell flew to Havana on Sept. 19 to see if Castro aides could shed light on the assassination plot, but the only advice they could offer was to execute Oswald in the hope that would stop the plan.

But Nagell left Cuba deciding that he "was an intelligence agent, not a killer." Flying to El Paso via Mexico City, he walked into the bank the next day for "the sole purpose of having myself arrested and detained by federal authorities" — apparently fearing that his association with Oswald would implicate himself in the planned assassination.

Nagell was in the El Paso jail when Kennedy was shot in Dallas two months later. He sent an offer to testify before the Warren Commission through "private channels" but received no reply.

Dedicated Leftist

In his recent discussions with Popkin, Nagell has revealed new details about Oswald. He first met Oswald, he said, in the late fifties at the U.S. naval base at Atsugi, Japan, where Oswald was a Marine Corps radar specialist. They became friends but didn't encounter one another again until August 1963 when Nagell learned of the plot against Kennedy.

Disputing claims that Oswald had ties with the CIA, Nagell believes that Oswald was a dedicated leftist who was duped by anti-Castro exiles involved in the conspiracy. Posing as Castro G-2 intelligence agents, the exiles wheedled Oswald into becoming a "fall guy" by playing on his Castro sympathies, painting Kennedy as anti-Castro and promising that he would be spirited to Havana after the assassination.

Nagell told Popkin he met with Oswald both in Mexico City and New Orleans, hotbeds of the anti-Castro movement. "Nagell claims he has squirreled away a snapshot of himself with Lee Harvey Oswald taken in Jackson Square in New Orleans in 1963," Popkin asserted. "In the picture are two other men, both anti-Castro Cubans, who were pretending

If this photograph does exist it would lend credibility to Nagell's account. And Na is willing to surface and te. his story to Congress, Popkin says, provided protective conditions are met.

"Manchurian Candidate"

Popkin is also convinced that the Manila "Manchurian Candidate" case was connected to the JFK assassination. On March 2, 1967, a man named Luis Angel Castillo was detained by the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation after he had contacted left-wing Huk guerrillas. Questioned under truth serum and hypnosis, Castillo blurted out a tale of having been taken to a building in Dallas, Tex., the day Kennedy was shot, handed a rifle assembled from components hidden in a bowling bag and instructed to fire at a man in an open car sitting next to a lady. The signal to fire would be given by mirror flashes.

The story caused a brief sensation at the time. The Manila *Times* bannered: "'JFK Plotter' in Manila!" Wire service dispatches to the United States said Castillo was a "Cuban-trained Communist agent" who hadn't shot because he heard that a man named Joe "had already shot the man in the open car." The story was so implausible that it quickly died.

Not long ago the hypnotist who conducted the interrogation of Castillo for the Philippine authorities arrived in this country under the name Vincente R. Sanchez. When Popkin took a look at his reports, his eyes popped.

The reports termed Castillo a "zombie" — a hypnoprogrammed robot.

Double-Agent Network

Sanchez extracted Castillo's rambling story over a period of weeks. Castillo, then 28, was inducted around 1960 into a "Special Operations Group" which afforded him paramilitary training. In 1961 he participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion, as a pilot for the CIA. Thereafter he infiltrated a double-agent network, posing as a Communist in Venezuela and liquidating a Communist agent in Mexico.

In talking about the JFK assassination, Castillo — despite some disjointed phrases — was nevertheless able to describe in some detail

ordered, "They got him already. Let's get out of here." After the rifle was disassembled and stuffed in the bowling bag, he was hustled into the car which had brought him to the building. It stopped twice within blocks to pick up other men.

In 1967, according to Sanchez, Castillo was programmed to assassinate Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos after openly associating with the leftist Huks — which would implicate them in the assassination. Popkin points out that this is a similar ploy to the one Nagell attributed to the anti-Castro Cubans' use of Oswald.

Until recently the Castillo episode might have seemed a logcial impossibility. But the release of the Rockefeller Report, with its revelations about secret CIA projects to induce behavior modification in unsuspecting subjects, make the possibility of a "Manchurian Candidate" more than mere fantasy. (In the Robert Kennedy assassination, Dr. Bernard Diamond, who examined Sirhan Sirhan for the defense, testified that he believed Sirhan was hypnotized at the time of the shooting.)

Although the current whereabouts of Castillo is unknown, the Sanchez reports contain the names of six persons who supposedly ran his network, including the "control officer" and a woman who hypnotized him. Popkin's own investigations have shown that these people do exist.

Through Popkin their stories have now been passed on to the Attorney General and the Church Committee.

William Turner's latest book, The Cuba Project, *the story of the CIA's secret war against Castro, will be published this fall by Houghton Mifflin.* □